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SUBJECT: BULGARIA: AS GOVERNMENT TAKES TO THE CAMPAIGN

TRAIL, DECISIONS LIKELY TO BE ON HOLD

1.(SBU) SUMMARY: The effective lame-duck status of the incumbent government will preclude its taking any major decisions or pursuing new initiatives from the end of May until the new cabinet takes office after the elections. Bulgaria's June 25 elections will be preceded by a month-long campaign, during which the incumbent parliament is not operational and cabinet ministers spend much of their time on the campaign trail. Following the elections, the formation of a new government will likely take another month. Thus, there will be at least a two-month period from the end of May until the end of July when we can expect very little substantive activity from the Bulgarian government. Their ability and willingness to respond to our initiatives will be similarly limited. END SUMMARY

12. (U) The powers of the incumbent parliament expire on June 17 when it formally dissolves. However, the parliament will cease holding sessions May 25 when the election campaign officially begins. In order to participate in the campaign, candidates who occupy a government post, including deputy ministers, must take leave. That will be the case, for example, with Interior Ministry Chief Secretary Gen. Boiko Borissov, who will run for parliament on the ruling party ticket. However, this requirement does not apply to the PM and his ministers, who continue nominally to perform their duties during the campaign and after the elections until the new cabinet is sworn in. Although the government is formally operational, its decision-making ability slows to a crawl as most ministers spend the bulk of their time in their constituencies. A total of 12 out of 20 cabinet ministers from the ruling party will run for parliament.

13. (U) Within a month after the election, the President must convene the newly elected MPs for the first session of parliament. After political consultations, the President then tasks the PM-designate of the largest parliamentary group to form a government. There is no set deadline for the President to ask the first-place party to form a government, but Purvanov's advisors have assured us he will act quickly.

14. (U) In the event the parliament fails to approve the government line-up or the PM designate fails to propose a cabinet within seven days of being asked, the mandate goes to the second largest parliamentary group. If the PM designate of the second largest group fails to form a government, or the proposed government is not approved by the Parliament, the President, at his discretion, tasks any of the other parliamentary groups to nominate a PM. Only if the third parliamentary group's PM designate fails to form a government, or this government is not approved, does the President then appoint a caretaker PM and government, dissolves parliament and schedules new elections.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: The incumbent government operates on a lame-duck basis until its successor is sworn in following the elections, a process that in the past has taken roughly a month. However, there is no specific timeline in Bulgarian law, so a drawn out process is possible. If the front-running Socialists are unable to secure an absolute majority in parliament they will need to forge a coalition, which could require lengthy negotiations. In any case, there will be at least a two-month period from the end of May until the end of July when we can expect very little substantive activity from the Bulgarian government. END COMMENT